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THE VOWEL-SOUNDS

OF THE

EAST YORKSHIRE FOLK-SPEECH

BY THE

REV. M. C. F. MORRIS, B.C.L., M.A.
RECTOR OF NUNBURNHOLME, YORKSHIRE
AUTHOR OF 'YORKSHIRE FOLK-TALK'

LONDON
HENRY FROWDE, AMEN CORNER
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THE following pages are the outcome of a paper which I read during the present year before the members of the East Riding Antiquarian Society at their annual meeting at Beverley. A desire having been expressed by some who heard the paper that it might be printed, I am glad to be able to fall in with that request.

Several additions and emendations have been since made in the manuscript, which I hope may make it somewhat more readable.

M. C. F. M.

NUNBURNHOLME,
October 26, 1901.

THE VOWEL-SOUNDS

OF THE

EAST YORKSHIRE FOLK-SPEECH

THERE is, and always must be, a difficulty in giving a perfectly correct idea of the vowel-sounds of any dialect, or, for that matter, of any standard language, by means of ordinary letters. We can, of course, come near to these sounds in this way, but the device will inevitably be doomed to failure in certain cases, simply because there are no vowel-sounds or combinations of them in the standard tongue which are quite in unison with those as they are heard in many dialectical words, or at least none which can be made at all easy to be understood. But when we come to phonetic signs, such as those that have been adopted by many philologists, the case is altered; for by these methods of notation, every gradation of vowel-sound can be described to a nicety. One or other of these phonetic methods I might have adopted here; and although they have the merit of comparative simplicity, they nevertheless have to be specially learnt by those who would take advantage of them in writing or reading, and so I thought it best on the whole to fall back on the easier, albeit more clumsy plan of making use of well-known vowel-sounds in ordinary English words to describe what I wished. This method I have hitherto generally found to be

adequate for my purpose: to it, therefore, I still have a mind to keep.

In treating of the vowel-sounds of our East Yorkshire folk-speech, one naturally begins with those which fall under the head of the first letter of the alphabet, commonly called *A*. I say commonly called, for few Englishmen would think that there ever could be the smallest difficulty in sounding that letter. *A* is *A*, and there is an end of it. So it seemed to me, until a few years ago when I was abroad and came across a young Scandinavian who was learning English, and was most anxious to tongue it rightly. He spoke it with very fair fluency, and read it remarkably well, but I noticed that he could never make our English *A*-sound. He asked me to point out any defects he might have in his utterances, and seeing that this sound is such an oft-recurring one in our language, I tried, as well as I could, to show him where his chief faults lay. He was most attentive to all my criticisms; but, do what I would, I could not get him to sound rightly this particular vowel. I repeated it over and over again, sometimes very slowly, sometimes more quickly, but always as clearly as I could; yet, all to no purpose. I was on the point of giving up my attempt as hopeless, when a thought suddenly struck me, and it was this, that the English *A* is not a simple vowel-sound at all, but a mixed one. Accordingly, I split it into its component elements: these two parts answered exactly to the Scandinavian *æ*-sound and *i*-sound, and I got my young friend to utter these two vowel-sounds together, first slowly, and by degrees quickly: by this means he got the *A*-sound to perfection, and great was his delight when he accomplished it. I mention this little incident, firstly because in our

East Yorkshire folk-speech the ordinary English *A*-sound is practically unheard; and also, because its place is very largely taken by the same Scandinavian *æ*-sound to which I alluded. This sound in Yorkshire is somewhat more drawn out than it would generally be in Scandinavia, but in its essence it is one and the same. The Yorkshire *A*-sound is a specially characteristic one in our dialect, and by varying intonations it is in certain cases made to express much. We have this vowel-sound in such words as *braay*, *laate*, *maade*, *haay*, *paay*; we hear it to advantage in the negative *naay*, and less strongly though quite plainly in the first vowel element of the word *air* in standard English. From a musical point of view, our Yorkshire *A*-sound is preferable to the ordinary one, as every vocalist knows.

Then, what may be called the middle *A*-sound should be specially noted, for with some it might escape notice altogether; there is, however, a clear distinction between it and the corresponding vowel-sound in standard English. I mean the sound as it occurs in such words as *bat*, *black*, *hat*, *ham*, *lamb*, *cap*, &c. This *a*-sound is more open than that of the ordinary English pronunciation of the vowel in these words, and yet it is by no means so open as the *ah*-sound: it may, perhaps, best be described as a highly abbreviated *ah*-sound, and so comes between that vowel and the *a* as sounded in these words in every-day English: it is for this reason that I call it the middle *a*-sound; and I believe that any one with a fairly sensitive ear could challenge a Yorkshireman by his sounding, let us say, of the single word *black*. I may here be straining the point a little too far, and yet I scarcely think that I am. I would only ask those who have any knowledge of the dialect to listen care-

fully for these variations of vowel-sounds; and the more they listen, the more clear will the differences become.

In the third place we have the well-known *ah*-sound, the foreign *a*, which is heard in the dialect most perfectly in the personal pronoun *I* (*ah*), which is the same form of that pronoun as is heard in the dialect of West Jutland. It is rather a remarkable fact that this sound is heard for the most part, not in words which in ordinary English are spelt with the letter *a*, but in those which are spelt with an *i*: thus, for example, *bide*, *time*, *side*, *rive*, with many more like them, become on Yorkshire tongues *bahd*, *tahm*, *sahd*, *rahve*. It is, moreover, curious that many words spelt with *a*, and in Southern England pronounced with the *ah*-sound, in Yorkshire take quite a different, and much less open vowel-sound. For instance, *grass*, *fast*, *last*, which in Southern England would be sounded *grahss*, *fahst*, *lahst*, with us would be *grăss*, *făst*, *lăst*, the vowel here having the same sound as in *sand*. It may be added that the sounding of such words as those last named is common with all classes of Yorkshiremen.

There is still another variation of this vowel, which needs only a word or two of comment, and that is the short *a*-sound. This is of frequent occurrence: we meet with it in the following, *fră*, *mă*, *thă*, and especially at the ends of the words denoting the days of the week, Sund*a*, Mond*a*, Tuesd*a*, &c.; also very commonly at the ends of place-names, e. g. *Bev'la*, *Stowsla*, *Helmsla*; and similarly at the end of many patronymics, for instance, *Wheatla*, *Han'la*, *Shipla*, *Bo'lla*, which are derived from places; and many more besides.

It will thus be seen that under this head there are *four* distinct vowel-sounds, viz. *ah*, middle *a*, short *a*, and

what I may call the characteristic Yorkshire *aa*. I will presently give a few sentences in the dialect illustrative of a variety of the East Yorkshire vowel-sounds; but if we needed a short one containing the four *a*-sounds to which I have drawn attention, the following would suffice for our purpose:—*Ah laay Jack 'll be at Bev'la.*

It may be added that in a few words where *a* is followed by *r* in standard English, a peculiar change of vowel takes place. We find this in the following words, *arm*, *card*, *park*, and *part*, which in the folk-speech would be sounded somewhat as *airm*, *caird*, *pairk*, and *pairt*, though in these cases the *r* scarcely asserts itself at all, and no approach to a trill is ever by any chance heard. The words *bark*, *cart*, *dark*, and *mark* follow the ordinary rule of pronunciation; while *hark* has a kind of intermediate sounding, and is pronounced almost as *hak*, only with a little more of the open *a*-sound than is indicated by the spelling.

There are some curious variations in the sounding of the vowel *E* in the dialect, as compared with ordinary English. In many cases the two are identical, as e.g. in *bet*, *wet*, *mend*, *send*, *step*, *led*. These need no comment. In a certain number of words, however, the *e* is changed to *i*; thus, *yet* becomes *yit*; *get*, *git*; *red*, *rid*; *ever*, *ivver*; *never*, *nivver*. There are words, too, in which the *e* is followed by *a*, but have the same sounding in standard English as they would have without the *a*. Some of these, also, in the dialect take the *i*-sound; for instance, *ready* becomes *riddy*, and *steady*, *stiddy*; though on the other hand, *spread* in the East Yorkshire tongue is *spreed*, and *bread*, *breead*. It is a matter of difficulty to give reasons for these forms, and to deduce fixed laws with regard to them. In many cases, if not in

most, they are of great antiquity, and may be traced often to Anglo-Saxon times, or to Norse influences, which acted so powerfully in this part of England. *Bread*, for instance, would be sounded almost as a word of two syllables—*breead*; whether this is due to the influence of Norse dialects, or to an earlier Anglian pronunciation, I cannot say. The Yorkshire form *stiddy*, too, is interesting, for there is literary authority for it as early as from 1200–1250. It is, moreover, the every-day term for the blacksmith's anvil, the root idea of the word being, of course, fixedness. It is to be hoped that this old word will never be suffered to go out of use.

The *E*-sound is changed to short *a* in *me*, *thee*, and *she*; though in the last named a short *u* commonly takes the place of the *a*. Again, if the *e* be followed by *r* or *ar*, it is often changed to *a*, as in our Yorkshire forms *sartain*, *arn* (earn), *larn*, *sarve*, *starn* (stern); while *errand* is generally sounded *eearan'*—a word of no little interest, being in Middle English *erende* or *erande*, in Icelandic *eyrendi*, and in modern Danish *ærende*.

I cannot omit noticing here the extraordinary prevalence of the *eea* sound in all parts of East Yorkshire. There seems to be a sort of fascination for this particular vowel-break; and its almost magnetic force attracts to itself words containing vowel-sounds of the most widely different kind in ordinary English, and I have no hesitation in saying that this *eea*-sound forms one of the most striking features in the ancient tongue of the East Yorkshire folk. Nearly all ordinary English words in which the vowels *e* and *a* are found in juxtaposition, so as to form together one syllable, are in the dialect distinctly, nay, I might almost say emphatically, sounded as two. It would, perhaps, be more correct to say that

time was when the *ea* was pronounced as two syllables generally; and while, in the run of years, this double sound has been drawn into one in the standard English of this day, in the Yorkshire folk-speech the older double sound goes on as of yore.

People sometimes speak as though the various dialectical vowel-sounds were mere vulgarisms, or mispronunciations of King's English. This, as I need hardly point out, is a most mistaken view to take; for, in truth, many of our Yorkshire vowel-sounds are quite as correct philologically as any of those in King's English: they may, indeed, be archaic, but they are not wrong; and in many cases it would be no more true to say that standard English is a mispronunciation of 'Yorkshire' than that 'Yorkshire' is a mispronunciation of modern English. Each has a history of its own; and though I should not go so far as to say that there is a good account to be given of the Yorkshire vowel-sounds in all cases, yet, in a very large number of instances, they stand upon as good a footing as any other words do, and it can only be ignorance or conceit which causes people to regard such words in the light of vulgarisms.

But to go back to the *eea*-sound. I will give some examples where *eea* occurs in words which are sounded as one, but which in the dialect resolve themselves into two; thus, for example, *beal*, *dread*, *dream*, *head*, *lean*, *leave*, *leaf*, *mean*, *speak*, *tread*, *instead*, &c., become *beeal*, *dreead*, *dreeam*, *heead*, *leean*, *leeave*, *leeaf*, *meean*, *speeak*, *treead*, *insteead*, &c.

This strong tendency towards the *eea*-sound acts upon a large number, though not on all words having the ordinary English *a*-sound. Let us take such words as

blame, *blade*, *cake*, *dame*, *lame*, *same*, *safe*, *tale*, *waste*; these in Yorkshire are *bleeam*, *bleead*, *ceeak*, *deeam*, *leeam*, *seeam*, *seeaf*, *teeal*, *weeaste*. Some exceptions to this rule would be *bake*, which is sounded *baake* (*beeak* being the Yorkshire for *book*), *dale*, *frame*, *late*, *rate*, all sounded with the Yorkshire *a* (*reeat* being the equivalent for *root*), though *dale* is in parts of the North Riding sounded as *deeal*.

A still larger class of words, attracted as it were by main force to the *eea*-sound, are those which contain the vowel-sounds of *o* or *oo*. For instance, *book*, *bone*, *boot*, *cool*, *fool*, *foot*, *home*, *look*, *none*, *proof*, *root*, *school*, *whole*, *no*, *do*, *so*, with many others that might be given, are sounded *beeak*, *beean*, *beeat*, *ceeal*, *feeal*, *feeat*, *heeam*, *leeak*, *neean*, *preeaf*, *reeat*, *scheeal*, (*w*)*heeale*, *neea*, *deea*, *seea*. In some cases there is more than one form under this head. Thus, *book* has the honour of having no less than three soundings in the dialect, viz. *bōōk*, *beeak*, and *bewk*; and *home* may be *heeam*, *yam*, or *wom* (East Riding); *look* falls under the same category as *book*, and is sounded *lōōk*, *leeak*, or *lewk*. The negative *no*, besides *neea*, has the very common sounding *naw*, as well as *naay*.

Again, a certain number of words ending in *ough* gravitate to the same *eea*-sound; e.g. *enough*, *plough*, *tough*, *bough*, would be sounded *eneeaf*, *pleeaf*, *teeaf*, *beeaf*, but in the last named *bew* is also common. *Rough* and *through*, however, become *rūff* and *thruff* in the folk-speech, and *though* is changed to *thoff*.

The constant occurrence of this particular vowel-sound in the dialect is, as I said, undoubtedly one of its most marked characteristics, and causes those who are unused to it no little difficulty in understanding

the vocables that undergo this change of vowel-sound. I remember hearing of a man in a village I know in the North Riding asking for *tweea breead leeaves* (two bread loaves): this is perhaps an extreme, but certainly no imaginary case.

It was only the other day that I had before me rather an interesting illustration of the strong inclination there is in the district to retain the vocal usage to which I have just been referring. I was making some investigations for a friend at a distance as to any local traditions there might be with regard to the battle of Stamford Bridge, and among other things I was told of the famous 'Pear Pie Feast,' which used to be held there every year in commemoration of the battle, though I regret to say that this old and extremely interesting custom has died out, but only within the last few years. The existence of this feast was known to many far beyond the neighbourhood of Stamford Bridge, but I believe it is not generally known why it came to be called the 'Pear Pie Feast,' which is a comparatively modern invention. Originally it was called the '*Spear* Pie Feast,' and the *raison d'être* of the name lay in this, that the main feature at the feast, which was celebrated by every household, consisted of what was called a *spear pie*. This was a pie made in the shape of a boat, or tub; and an iron, or in earlier days a wooden skewer was stuck upright through the middle of the pie. This was representative of the extemporized boat into which the Englishman got, and speared from beneath the bridge the Norse warrior who had held it so long. What the 'spear pies' had inside them I know not. I believe, however, that they contained fruit of some kind or other. Whatever it was, in later times it happened that some

excellent old pear-trees of the stewing kind grew in the village, and the fruit being ready about the time of the feast—September 25 (the battle having been fought on Monday, September 25, 1066), they made the pie of stewing-pears, and so, instead of a spear, it became a pear pie; this, according to the local pronunciation, was called a *peear* pie, or *spear* without the *s*—a sort of play on the word. I mention this local tradition merely because it contains what seems to me an interesting illustration of the Yorkshire rule in the sounding of the word *pear*. It forms, too, a remarkable bit of folk-lore.

Another peculiarity with regard to the treatment of the vowel *E* in the vernacular is to drop it, or seem to drop it, at the end of many monosyllables. Thus, *com*, *dar*, *gam*, *gav*, *mak*, *sham*, *shak*, *tak*, *yal*, *yat*, would be the East Yorkshire equivalents for *came*, *dare*, *game*, *gave*, *make*, *shame*, *shake*, *take*, *ale*, *gate*. In others, such as *lame*, *mane*, *mate*, *rate*, *tame*, the *e*-final is retained. No general rule can be laid down with regard to these changes. Some of them, such as *com*, *gav*, *sham*, are probably Norse forms; and it is rather singular that *lam*, which would be the Scandinavian equivalent for *lame*, does not follow the rule of the other words that I have mentioned, *leeame* or *laame* being the Yorkshire form of the word; this is only one more example of the extraordinary vagaries of human speech, baffling all explanation, going this way when you expect them to go that, up when you expect them to go down, and down when you expect them to go up.

The changes that take place in the dialect under the head of the vowel *I* are many and great, and some of the gradations of sound are not very clearly defined. It

would be impossible to explain these fully here. I can only hope to enter into those which are the most marked, and most frequently used at the present time.

In the first place, it should be noted that the common English *i*-sound, like that of *a*, is quite rare, I had almost said wholly foreign to our East Yorkshire language. The nearest approach, perhaps, to this sound occurs in the ordinary affirmative *aye*, though this is not quite identical with it, being a little less open in sound. It will be seen, therefore, what an immense number of dialectical changes take place under this head alone.

The three most frequent substitutions for the *i*-sounds are the *ey*-sound, the *ee*-sound, and the *ah*-sound or an approximation to it. For instance, the words *fight*, *might*, *pipe*, would be sounded *feyght*, *meyght*, and *peype*; whereas *bright*, *light*, *night*, and *right* would be changed to *breet*, *leet*, *neet*, *reet*; while *bide*, *rive*, and *time* would appear as *bahd*, *rahve*, and *tahm*. It should here be added that in certain cases the *i*-sound undergoes a less violent change than in others, being toned down to an *ahi*-sound; for instance, *pie* would be sounded *pahi*; and *fine*, *fahine*; and yet, as I said, *time* is always sounded *tahm*: it would be a mistake to call *pie*, *pah*; *fine*, *fahn*; or *time*, *tahim*. I have heard *fine* sounded *feyne*, and that, too, by old people who spoke the dialect with great purity; but as far as my memory serves me, I do not think I have heard that particular pronunciation of the word beyond the limits of the East Riding.

These variations in the *i*-sound are very numerous and somewhat intricate: they constitute what I might call some of the greatest niceties or delicacies of the ancient tongue of the East Yorkshire folk. It is an extremely difficult thing for one who has not been born,

or at all events spent his early years in the district, and thus been in the way of hearing them constantly, to acquire the right usage of these gradations of vowel-sounds. It is in these of which I have just been speaking, more perhaps than in any others, where the 'outlander' betrays his ignorance or incapacity when he tries to talk 'Yorkshire.' To me it is little short of painful to hear some people try to make others believe that they are speaking good 'Yorkshire,' giving as they often do a wrong vowel-sound in more than half the words they use, to say nothing of the words themselves. Their attempts are the veriest parody of true 'Yorkshire.' I know not how far Yorkshire folk of the present generation would be able to understand the limping utterances of such as those to whom I refer, but I am convinced that the old folks could no more understand them than they would if they were spoken to in French or in the language of the Prayer Book.

As I have already observed, these variations of the *i*-sound are many and great; and although I have been familiar with them all my life, and have paid some attention to them, I have never been able to give an account of them which has satisfied me.

As to whether the change should be made to *ah* or *ey*, it is a little difficult, perhaps, to say in all cases; speaking roughly, however, the rules would seem to be these:—

I is changed to *ah* or *ahi* when followed by

(1) A flat consonant; i.e. by *b*, *d*, *g*-hard, *j* (or *g*-soft), *v*, *z*, or *s* with the z-sound.

(2) The liquids *l*, *m*, *n*.

(3) Another vowel.

e.g. *brahbe*, *sahd*, *dhrahve*, *tahm*, *prahiz*, *tahie*.

I is changed to *ey* when it is followed by

(1) A sharp consonant, i.e. by one of the letters *c* or *s* with sharp sound, *f*, *k*, *p*, or *t* (generally).

(2) The remaining liquid *r*.

Thus we should say, *neyce*, *leyfe*, *leyke*, *peype*, *beyte*, *feyre*. It would be atrocious for us to say *nahice*, *lahife*, *lahike*, &c.

One word must be said about the personal pronoun *I*. This is invariably *ah*, except when immediately following the auxiliary verb, or when emphasis is needed: thus we should say *Ah mun gan* (I must go): but in the interrogation form it would be *Mun ĭ gan?* We should only say *Mun ah gan?* when one or more others besides the speaker were involved in the question of going.

Words in which the *i*-sound is long in standard English frequently shorten it in the dialect: for instance, *bind*, *blind*, *climb*, *find*, become *binnd*, *blinnd*, *climm*, *finnd*. *Wind* is sounded both ways.

I, when followed by *r*, undergoes a very remarkable change, being then sounded somewhat as a short *o*, though not in exact unison with that vowel, having distinctly something of the *au*-sound in it, though in rather a subtle form. Thus, such words as *first*, *third*, *bird*, *dirty*, *thirty*, &c., would be sounded *fo'st*, *tho'd*, *bo'd*, *do'tty*, *tho't-ty*, &c. On the other hand, *girl* is sounded *gel*; *girth*, *geth*; *girn*, *gen*.

The changes that take place under the head of the vowel *o* are also very numerous. There again, as is the case with *a* and *i*, the ordinary English *o*-sound is rarely heard at all in the folk-speech, its place being most commonly taken by the *au*-sound; and the same remark applies to the kindred *ou* or *ow*-sound.

I have already referred to the prevalence of the *eea*-

sound in the folk-speech, and a number of words ending in *o* in ordinary English take that form in our folk-speech, e.g. *do*, *so*, *two*, *no*, *who*; though the last named is very often sounded *whau* as well as *wheea*.

O is changed to *a* in certain cases; thus, *among*, *long*, *strong*, *wrong* are sounded *amang*, *lang*, *stthrang*, *wrang*.

The *au*-sound is heard in endless cases; nearly all words, for instance, that have the *o*-sound in ordinary English, and are spelt with *ow* for that vowel-sound, are sounded as *au* in the dialect; thus, *blow*, *crow*, *flow*, *grow*, *know*, *low*, *row*, *slow*, *snow*, with many more, would be sounded *blaw*, *craw*, *flaw*, *graw*, *knaw*, *law*, *raw*, *slaw*, *snaw*, in East Yorkshire. On the other hand, words that have the same spelling as the aforesaid, but which are pronounced with the *ou*-sound in ordinary English, in the dialect are sounded with the *u*-sound; thus e.g.:—*bow*, *brow*, *cow*, *how*, *now*, in the vernacular are sounded *boo*, *broo*, *coo*, *hoo*, *noo*.

As we might expect, people from a distance are often bewildered by these characteristic vowel-sounds, and are apt to fall into rather amusing misunderstandings and mistakes in consequence.

I well remember on one occasion in my late parish, as I was taking a walk to one of the out-lying houses, accosting a little girl whom I had come up with on the road. She was a stranger to me, and as I knew every child in the parish, I thought it possible she might have come from a distance. Accordingly I addressed her in ordinary English, and asked her who she was. Not getting any intelligible reply to this inquiry, which I put down to her shyness, I proceeded to ask her who her mother was, whereto she politely made answer that she was very well. I told her I was

pleased to hear that; and understanding by that reply that she was Yorkshire indeed, I shaped my course accordingly, and put my next question in the proper Yorkshire form in these words—'Then, what do they call you?': and by her answer to this question I at once made out who she was, and the house at which she was staying, which, if I remember rightly, was the very one for which I was myself bound.

Sometimes, however, even two Yorkshiremen may be at cross purposes over a question or answer in which one of these common vowel-sounds is involved. I remember hearing of the newly married Yorkshireman who was on the point of starting for his honeymoon, and was met by a brother Yorkshireman of his acquaintance who offered him his congratulations, and inquired where he intended going on that happy occasion: whether the bridegroom thought this a little too inquisitive or not I cannot say: at all events he responded briefly 'Norway.'

'*Naw*-waay, *Naw*-waay!' repeated the other, 'Whya, ah thinks ah sud be gannin' *sum*-waay.'

I spoke just now of the strong attractive force of the *eea*-sound in East Yorkshire, and among other examples I brought forward the word *errand*, which we sound *eearan'*. It was over this word that I once heard of an amusing mistake being made. An assistant in a grocer's establishment at Middlesbrough—a *gaumish* young fellow—told me that when he was in a shop at Whitby they had engaged the services of an assistant who was totally unaccustomed to their mode of speech. I do not remember exactly where he came from, but it was from some place down south. One day a farm lad from one of the country places near Whitby entered the shop, and asked for the *eearans* his mother had bought. The

south countryman was sorely perplexed, and no further enlightenment could he get from the country lad. He considered for a moment, and then, doubtless bethinking him of Whitby's fishing industry, replied that no *herrings* had been left there.

We now come to one of the most interesting, and at the same time perhaps the most euphonious of all the dialectical vowel-sounds, I mean the true northern *u*-sound, such, for instance, as we hear in the ordinary English word *full*. Those who have any ear for musical sound can have no hesitation, surely, in giving the preference to this, over the vowel-sound in the word *but*. In East Yorkshire practically every *u* has this sound in a more or less extended degree. Such words as *cut*, *hut*, *nut*, *must*, *dust*, *dull*, *hush*, *rust*, *trust*, &c., are never by any chance sounded as in ordinary English. We always adopt the northern *u* in these cases. A great many words, too, which have the *ou*-sound take this pronunciation in a rather more prolonged degree; thus, *house* is *hus*; *town*, *tun*; *mouse*, *mus*; and in *but* (*būd*) the *u*-sound is more sustained than in any other word in the whole of the Yorkshire vocabulary with the exception of *suck*, which is sounded *sook*.

Words in ordinary English in which *u* is followed by *r* have the same rule as those in which *i* is followed by *r*, being sounded almost as *o*; thus—*curtsey* would be sounded *co'tsey*; *durst*, *do'st*; and *hurt*, *ho't*: as an exception to this rule, however, *curd* is changed to *crud*—a word of great importance in Yorkshire cookery.

In some words the *u* is changed to *i*, e. g. *much*, *mich*; *such*, *sich* or *sike*.

Sugar and *sure* take the *eea* sound, and become respectively *seeagar* and *seear*.

By a strange perversity which I cannot account for, some words which in standard English have the northern *u*-sound do not retain it in the folk-speech, but take instead the *iew*-sound. Thus *flute* would be pronounced *fliewte*, and *rhubarb*, *rhiewbu'b*; and many words in *ue* or *ui* also take this sound; thus, *true* becomes *tthriew*; *blue*, *bliew*; and *fruit*, *friewt*. We may observe, however, that in these cases the pronunciation of this vowel, though peculiar, is identical with that as uttered in the name we give to the letter itself—*iew* (u).

The only remark that I need here make under the head of the letter *Y* is that some words beginning with *a*, *o*, and *ho* prefix *y* before them; thus, *ale*, *once*, *hot*, *oak*, *hook* have their Yorkshire equivalents in *yal*, *yance*, *yat*, *yak*, *yuk*.

Oven used generally to be called *yewn*, and sometimes *yuvven*, though both these old forms are but seldom heard now, as compared with what they used to be.

It is noteworthy that the common pronunciation of York is *Yorrk*, the *r* being trilled; though in the south part of the North Riding I used pretty often, and very distinctly, to hear it called *Yurk*; and I regard both these as very old forms. Probably, too, the latter points more clearly to the derivation of that name than does its present form. Through not understanding that *Yorrk* is the Yorkshireman's sounding of the name of the ancient capital of the north, people from a distance have frequently been the victims of a common misunderstanding with regard to it. I remember hearing of a visitor at a farmhouse being told that one of the farm lads had just gone to *yauk*; thinking, of course, that he had gone to the city of York, and it being rather

late in the evening, the visitor expressed surprise that the lad had gone so far at such an hour, whereupon it was explained to him that the lad had gone no further than the stable in order to *yauk* (yoke) the horse, that is, to harness it into the dog-cart!

And this reminds me of another parallel case which came under my own observation. I was present at our village school some years ago on the occasion of the annual visit, as it then was, of Her Majesty's Inspector. He had read out a piece of English as an exercise in dictation. The subject was 'The Bear,' and special mention was made of the beast's claws. Among the papers I looked through was that of a lad whose parents were Yorkshire to the backbone, and I could not resist giving way to a feeling of delight when I saw that instead of *claws* the boy had repeatedly written it *clothes*, which word, as I need hardly add, is in Yorkshire commonly sounded *claws*. I felt inclined to commend the lad for his Yorkshire orthography, and for adhering so faithfully to his mother-tongue even when it did violence to his reason, though I am afraid the Inspector, who came from the south, took a different view!

Such in outline are the principal changes in the vowels of our East Riding folk-speech, as compared with those of King's English. And who will be so rash as to say that these ancient and traditional vowel-sounds of the vernacular, which have been handed down from father to son unwritten, except in the memories, yes! and in the hearts of the people, through many centuries, are mere barbarisms, vulgarities, mispronunciations of other and better English, and therefore to be half-ashamed of, and suited only for street corners? Because I, a Yorkshireman, choose to call a house a *hus*, or my native village

a *tun*, or the tongs *tengs*, am I therefore to be put down as an uncouth ruffian who does not know how to speak properly? The truth is that these traditional forms of the words that go to make up what we call our dialect are not vulgarisms at all, but some of the very best and purest English that can be spoken. 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing,' and I am afraid under our system of education, by which people seem to wish to get a smattering of everything and know nothing, we are apt to consider a great many things as vulgar which are not vulgar at all, and this matter of speech is one of them. It is certainly much better to talk good old 'Yorkshire,' which is the very essence of raciness, and has had a lengthy past history, than to make use perpetually of slangy expressions which are but of yesterday, and new-fangled Americanisms which are not suited to the tongue or character of the people on this side of the Atlantic. It is quite extraordinary how frightened some people are of being thought guilty of using a Yorkshire word or vowel-sound which is not to be found in an English dictionary or grammar. It sometimes happens, however, that in their eagerness to avoid what they are pleased to call 'vulgarisms,' they fall into mistakes which they little thought of. I had an amusing illustration of this brought before my notice not long since. At the boundary on one side of the parish of Nunburnholme there lies a wood called 'Meerbalks Planting.' The name is an interesting one, and I was speaking to a lad about it one day, when he told me that a short time previously they had had staying with them some friends from a distance. These friends had often heard the name 'Meerbalks Planting' before, and had thought the designation savoured too much of

the dialect, and so deemed it vulgar. Accordingly, after coming in from a walk one day, and being asked in which direction they had been, they replied that they had been to *Mare-beam's* Plantation; *mare* being the English equivalent to the word *meer* in the dialect, and *beam* one of the significations of *balk*, but both, I need hardly say, being very wide of the mark in this case.

Speaking generally, the treatment of the vowel-sounds in the dialect is so unlike that of the English of to-day that it is not too much to say that there is hardly a single vowel in the standard tongue that is sounded in the same way as the vowel in the corresponding word would be in the traditional tongue of the people.

I will now give a few sentences of what I may call ordinary English, and then turn the vowel-sounds in them into those answering to them in the dialect, and it will at once be seen what a complete transformation takes place. Let it, however, be clearly understood that I shall not write the translated sentences exactly, perhaps, as they would naturally be formed, that is to say, with the proper phrasing of the Yorkshire speech, but merely render the English sentences word for word into their Yorkshire equivalents. I will make the sentences, therefore, as simple as possible, and free from idioms, so that the phraseology may correspond as nearly as may be with that of the East Yorkshire dialect.

1. (*a*) Standard English.

I have the old gray mare yet, but she has not much work to do now.

(*b*) East Yorkshire Dialect.

Ah a'e (*or* ev) t' au'd graay meear yit, bud sha es nut mich wark (*or* worrk) ti deea nu.

2. (*a*) I dare say some of you do not know who it is that is speaking to you.

(*b*) Ah dar saay sum o' ya deea nut knaw whau it is 'at 's speeakin' ti ya.

3. (*a*) He came to my house to look at a beast I had bought the day before; and as soon as he came he did nothing but curse and swear, and he told me that the beast was all tail and bones. However, after a bit, I took him into the house and gave him some bread and a sup of ale, and he very soon got settled down again, and he went off home.

(*b*) He com ti mah hus ti leeak at a beeas ah ed bowt t' daay afoor; an' as seean as he com he did nowt bud co's an' sweear, an' he tell'd ma 'at it wer all taal an' beeans. Hooivver, efther a bit ah teeak him inti t' hus, an' gav him sum breead an' a sup o' yal, an' he varry seean gat sattled doon ageean, an' he off yam.

In giving the Yorkshire rendering of these short sentences, I must confess that my system of orthography somewhat fails to describe what the true vowel-sounds in some cases are; e. g. *bowt* and *off*, which I spell *b-o-w-t* and *o-f-f*, do not give a true expression phonetically of those vowel-sounds, nor can it thus be given, whereas the other and more scientific method which I alluded to would give them perfectly. However, in such cases, which are comparatively speaking rare, we must be satisfied with an approximation to the true sound.

It will naturally be asked by the philologist, what account can be given of these numerous peculiarities of vowel-sounds in the folk-speech of East Yorkshire. The answer is that in principle it is the same here as it is

with all dialects; we have what Professor Earle calls 'a mass of relics.' Sometimes the explanation is easy, sometimes most difficult; but in all cases it is next to impossible to lay down any hard and fast rule. There can, however, be little doubt that many of these peculiarities go back to Anglo-Saxon times, others are due to Norse influences, others again to later ones. Take, for instance, that very strong feature in the dialect to which I have already more than once alluded, the prevalence of the *eea*-sound. An immense number of words which in modern English are sounded as one syllable are in the dialect sounded as two, and in many cases the double vowel-sound is older than the single one. Many words which are now spelt with *ea* in ordinary English were in Chaucer's time spelt with *e* simply, and therefore, of course, were sounded by him and in court English as one syllable as now, though it is by no means certain that the vowel-sound would be the same as now, the *e* being sounded probably like *eh*, and somewhat as the French *e*. Such words as *bread*, *dead*, *death*, *great*, *please*, and many more like them, were spelt with an *e*, which *e* would be sounded very much as the *a* in *day*, though perhaps rather shorter. Are we to suppose, then, that in the fourteenth century our East Yorkshire folk so sounded these and other like words? I do not think it for a moment. They would be sounded by them exactly as they are now, and probably as they had sounded such words that were in use in Anglo-Saxon or later days. Indeed, taking it as a whole, I am inclined to think that our dialect, since the time of the Norman Conquest, has changed much less than the literary language has. In many cases it is likely that this *eea*-sound is a survival of an Anglian pronunciation,

though it seems to me perfectly certain that this remarkable tendency cannot be set down to any one cause, and I am convinced that in many cases the sound is simply imitative. No doubt in some cases the sound has been due to contact with Scandinavian influences. The Danish *j* preceding another vowel, as it does in so many Norse words, would naturally have a tendency to create the *eea*-sound. In the Danish word *hjem*, for example, the Jutlandic sounding of it would, almost to a certainty, cause a change from the older *ham* or *hame* to the Yorkshire *heeam*, which harmonizes so nearly with *hjem*. Mr. Kok, in his *Syd Jylland Danske Folkesprog*, observes of the Jutlandic dialects, 'alle selvlyde kunne udvides ved et foransat *j*' (all vowels can be extended by a prefixed *j*); and among other examples he gives that of *jen* for *en*, which is another case in point. Other words, however, which have come to us from springs other than Scandinavian, also take this form. Thus, *dame*, *decent*, *beast*, *face*, *pace*, *preach*, &c., are sounded *deeam*, *deeacent*, *beeas*, *feeace*, *peeace*, *preeach*, &c. These I take to be imitations of vowel-sounds already existing. It is very noteworthy, however, that in some cases where one might fully expect to hear the *eea*-sound repeated we do not do so. We might expect, for instance, to hear *game* pronounced *geeame* and *shame sheeame*, but we listen in vain. Our Yorkshire soundings of these words are *gam* and *sham*; these are the same in vowel-sound as the modern Danish for those words, which are derived from the Old Norse. One might proceed to show how many of our Yorkshire vowel-sounds may be traced to this source and to the kindred Scandinavian dialects, but this would carry me into fields far too wide to be dealt with here. I will nevertheless draw attention to

one rather striking example under this head, and that is the Yorkshire form of the personal pronoun *I*. In literary Danish *jeg* is the corresponding word, where the vowel-sound is identical with our *I*; but in the West Jutland *mundart* or folk-speech, which has such a strong affinity with 'Yorkshire,' *ah* is the invariable word used. *Jeg* and *ah* in the one case, *I* and *ah* in the other; there could hardly be a stronger likeness than this. From this source, too, we probably draw by far the greater portion of our characteristic *u*-sounds, such as we hear in *hus*; though some of these, as e.g. *cum* for *come*, may well be due to the earlier Anglian sounding of the vowel as it would be uttered in *cuman*.

Apart from the philological considerations connected with our East Yorkshire words and vowel-sounds, a knowledge of them has sometimes been known to have a practical utility. It was only the other day that I was talking to a Yorkshireman who had lately returned from a visit of some months in the wild west of Canada. At one point of his journey he was in a train full of foreigners of various nationalities, not one of whom could speak English: one of these—a female—through some mistake had got into the wrong part of the train, and she had to return to her own people, but the officials could not get her to understand this, and that she had to quit the compartment: from what country she came I know not, but I presume she was a Scandinavian of some sort. At all events the young Yorkshireman came to the rescue by trying her with a little of the Yorkshire dialect. All he said was 'Noo, yam it.' Few though his words were, they acted like magic: she instantly understood their purport, and changed for her right car.

Before bringing my remarks on this subject to an

ending, I should wish to say a word or two on the orthography of the dialect. In doing this I would urge those who write our East Yorkshire tongue to be more careful than they generally are in giving a better spelling of the words, and especially the vowel-sounds, as they are pronounced. This is not so difficult as is commonly supposed, but like everything else it needs some practice.

I happen to have in my possession a letter written by an old inhabitant of the East Riding, who spoke the language of her childhood with remarkable purity. The history of it is this. I was anxious to see what sort of attempt one of the old school would make in committing to writing in her native tongue thoughts which came uppermost in her mind. Fortunately I was able through the intervention of a mutual friend to induce the venerable lady referred to, to write a letter to this friend in the broad Yorkshire tongue with which she was so familiar. She was not what is called a specially 'good scholar'; still, she was enough so to be able to write an ordinary English letter quite well. But when it came to writing her own mother tongue, things were greatly changed, and she felt rather 'at sea.' However, the good old lady, who was at the time over eighty years of age, pulled herself together, and made trial of her skill in dialectical letter-writing. Whether any one else was by when she put pen to paper I know not, but I can well think I saw a twinkle in her eye as she sat down to see what she could do in this way. I am sure I shall be betraying no secrets if I reproduce something at least of what she put down in writing. And I do this not merely for the sake of giving a specimen of 'Yorkshire' letter-writing by an East

Ridinger of eighty summers, who had never before taken such a work in hand, but also and mainly to draw attention to the right spelling of the folk-speech generally.

Our old friend begins with a few words of what I must call ordinary English, in which she regrets her powerlessness to write 'Yorkshire' properly, and gives utterance to the wish that our other friend was at hand so that her words might be spoken instead, as they used to be spoken when she 'wer a lass.' She tells us (though she need hardly have done so) that *stee* stands for ladder, *deear* for door, *yat* for gate, *watter* for water, *hoo* for how, *grun'st'n* for grindstone. She then suddenly breaks off into the first person, and says she is 'boun ti wesh' and wants 'hauf a pund o' seeap.' That then 'sha's boun ti beeak when yune gits yat,' and that she wants a 'dubler ti mak a pie.'

Next, she wrote in her own natural and disconnected way a specimen of the folk-speech as she was wont to speak it. It ran thus:—'Bill; gan an fetch tweea au'd hosses an' yoke teea pleeaf, an' gan an' start ti plew steean pit flat. Ah wer talkin tiv a man yah daay an' he said he gat eneeaf ti eeat yance a week, an' that wer ke'n [churn] milk an' yat broon keeak. He said he used ti cleean his clog shoon for Sundays. (Ah sud leyke ti tell a good lot, bud ah can't spell mi aun talk.) When ah wer a gleeaner ther used ti be hundreds, bud noo, when floor 's cheeap they're all ower prood ti gan ti gleean. Yah day ah didn't knaw what ti hev ti dinner seea ah meead a apple dumplin (ah wad tell mair nobbut ah could spell better). When ah wer a lahtle lass at heeam ah heeard mi Faythe saay he wrought monny a hard daay, an' had nowt bud a bit o' broon breead ti

itt. They was nahn on us i fam'ly. Ah'd three sisters browt up on barley keeak; wheeat was a guinea a bushel, an' sau't fahve shillin' a steean; seea you see things is varry different noo a daays. Oor toon 's tonn'd upsahd doon sen we com ti live at it. We're hevving * * * * Thay's a man said tiv a lad gan th' waays int' kitchin an' ax deeam for a bit o' pie, then off thoo gans t' scheol. When ah wer a lass at heam ah yance hadled a speead guinea; ah nivver had bud that i mah leyfe, for sovereigns com i fashion hefter that —— yours &c. * *'

The only alterations in the letter that I have ventured to make are a very few slight ones to make it more easy to read. Many emendations might have been made, but on the whole it seems to me to be a very creditable production. There are other points in it both as to subject-matter as well as orthography, which might well be dwelt upon; but I must leave them. This only would I add that in speaking of the different kinds and gradations of vowel-sounds peculiar to our East Yorkshire folk-speech, it may be said by some of our townspeople that many of these sounds are by them but seldom if ever heard; and that may well be, for it is only too true that in these days of rapid changes in almost every department of life, old ways of speech are giving place to new, and the traditional folk-speech which for so many generations has been heard on all sides of us, is being driven more and more into the by-ways and out-of-the-way corners of the country. These lonesome spots, these distant valleys and hills, these isolated cottages, these homely firesides, wherever, in short, the rich and racy language of the old Yorkshire folk is spoken in its time-honoured purity and fullness, I look upon as almost sacred places: for in spite of its